

PEOPLE'S MEETING – A SCOTTISH FESTIVAL OF DEMOCRACY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council has been approached by the organisers of the established People's Meeting that is held annually in Denmark, backed by a range of Scottish partners, to see if we are interested in hosting a similar annual festival on the Island of Bute from 2027. This is still a competitive process that has been under development since 2025 with Rothesay being shortlisted with several other communities across Scotland.
- 1.2 The festival aims to start small initially. Held annually in June of each year it's predominately an outdoor event that also uses public buildings and private accommodation as necessary. The festival is designed for people of all political parties to come together in a neutral political environment to celebrate the fact we are a democracy.
- 1.3 Originally a Swedish concept, the Danish festival has been transformational for the small island community in Denmark and has attracted international interest and inspired other similar events. In Denmark, the festival has resulted in a 5% to 6% boost in tourism, £23m to £27m increase in tourism spending and 110 to 116 additional FTE jobs with additional revenue for the Council estimated at circa £700k per annum. The event has become financially self-sufficient through public and private sponsorship. Further details on the festival are provided in **Appendix A** of this report.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of this potential social and economic opportunity for Argyll and Bute and seek agreement for the Leader of the Council or his nominee and the Chief Executive to attend the Festival on 11th - 13th June to better understand what would be required by the Council before a report is brought back for a final decision on whether the Council should participate, or not. It is likely a decision will be made on the chosen site in Scotland in June of this year by the organisers informed by a feasibility framework they have developed that will be filled in by the Council.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council:

- i. Consider the contents of this report and approve sending the Leader of the Council or his nominee and the Chief Executive to the festival, who will report back on their findings to the Council at its June meeting prior to taking a decision on whether to support a bid, or not to proceed.

3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 The Council has been approached by the organisers of the People's Festival in Bonholm, Denmark and representatives of the Scottish Government regarding the possibility of hosting an annual democracy festival on Bute as a possible annual event commencing in 2027.
- 3.2 The festival aims to start small with a target of 1000 visitors per day over a three-day period. Then building to 20,000 a day over a period of five years. In Denmark the event attracts 40,000 participants over a three-day period on the island of Bornholm which is a community with less than 2,000 residents. Held annually in June of each year it's predominately an outdoor event (tented villages, pavilions) that also uses public buildings and private accommodation as necessary. The festival is designed for people of all political parties to come together in a neutral political environment. It has been transformational for this community in Denmark and has attracted international interest and inspired other similar events in Norway and Sweden. In Denmark the Festival has resulted in a 5% to 6% boost in tourism, £23m to £27m increase in tourism spending and 110 to 116 additional FTE jobs with additional revenue for the Council estimated at circa £700k per annum. The event has become financially self-sufficient through public and private sponsorship.
- 3.3 The current festival in Denmark is self-funding however a period of public subsidy is required to get it up and running and further clarity is required about this before any final decision is taken. The organisers have already identified potential sponsors/supporters listed in the **Appendix A** and the idea is that the financial burden on the host Local Authority is minimised making use of support in kind and use of Council assets such as land and buildings.
- 3.4 It is considered that the Island of Bute is a place with the capacity to deal with visitors albeit there is a current shortage of hotel space. It is however accessible to the Central Belt by ferry and rail for pedestrians to travel to and provides an extensive cultural offer and several local partners that can assist with the delivery of the festival working with the Council and other external partners. It is also worth noting that Bute is an island with the highest level of unemployment in Argyll and Bute and has experienced continued population loss with limited economic opportunities. The festival has the potential to provide a significant economic boost to the island on an annual basis attracting a wide range of participants and potential decision makers to our area. The

event would be held in June of each year prior to the peak tourism season providing a significant social and economic boost to the island.

- 3.5 At this stage further feasibility work needs to be undertaken before any decision is taken by the Council to participate further in this competitive process. As part of this process 2 Council representatives (one officer and one elected representative) have been invited to attend the festival on 11th – 13th June of this year to find out more about its activities. The purpose of this report is to seek Council permission to send the Leader of the Council or his nominee and the Chief Executive to help inform a decision being taken by the Council in June of this year. The flights and subsistence costs will be paid for by the Council using existing travel budgets, but accommodation will be met by the festival organisers.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The island of Bute has been shortlisted by the organisers of the Bornholm Democracy Festival in Denmark as a potential host for the annual People's Meeting, a democracy festival that aims to create a safe place for people to discuss democracy in a relaxed nonpartisan setting. The festival has the potential to be a significant social and economic boost for the island of Bute and would be held in June of each year prior to peak tourism season. This report provides information on the festival together with an attached slide presentation in **Appendix A** for members information. The specific ask is to permit the sending of two delegates, the Leader of the Council or his nominee and the Chief Executive, to the event to find out more information about the festival before a further report and feasibility study is brought back for the Council to express an interest of the event before a final decision is made by the organisers.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – None.
- 5.2 Financial – The two Council representatives will have to pay flights and subsistence costs with the accommodation paid for by the organisers of the festival. Further work will be undertaken to determine potential costs to the Council before a final decision is taken by the Council in June.
- 5.3 Legal – None at this stage however a partnership agreement or similar will be required and this will be considered as part of any agreement with the festival organisers.
- 5.4 HR – Resources will be required to manage this process however this is currently managed through existing staff and budgets at this stage.
- 5.5 Customer Service: None.
- 5.6 Risk: There is a need to fully understand the financial implications before a Council decision is taken. It should be noted that this is a competitive process

with no guarantee of success.

5.7 Climate Change: This is a major consideration of the festival.

5.8 Fairer Scotland Duty – None.

5.9 Equalities – Protected characteristics: This will be considered as part of the EOI.

5.10 Consumer Duty – This will be considered as part of the EOI.

5.11 Island Communities – This provides a cultural and socio-economic opportunity for the Isle of Bute.

5.12 Children’s Rights and Wellbeing – Will be considered as part of any decision to participate in the democracy festival or not.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A